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Protest of Papal Visit Part of Anti-Church Plan, Nicaraguan Says

Demonstrations against Pope John Paul II in Nicaragua last March were carefully orchestrated as part of a wider effort to discredit the church among the Nicaraguan people and neutralize its resistance to the Sandinista regime, according to a recent defector from the Nicaraguan intelligence service.

Miguel Bolanos Hunter, 24, said the plan was to associate priests and the existing church hierarchy with "the two enemies of the Nicaraguan people: the United States and the wealthy class, the bourgeoisie."

A "mob" of handpicked activists kept devout Catholics trapped in a church and away from the pope, who was then insulted and heckled as he tried to pray, Bolanos said, in order to make him appear isolated from the people during his visit to Managua.

The overall Sandinista effort against the church, according to Bolanos, has included close surveillance of Archbishop Miguel Obando y Bravo and a faked sex scandal last year involving one of his priests, the Rev. Bismarck Carballo.

Bolanos said the intelligence unit called F7, which had responsibility for mobilizing citizens for demonstrations, was ordered to pick 200 block leaders who each brought

five or six trusted residents to the public square where the pope was to speak in March. Anyone trying to attend independently was turned away, Bolanos said.

Catholics who did not want to heckle the pope went to the churches the night before his visit in order to pray all night, Bolanos said, intending to march together to the square the next day. Instead, he said, F7 agents organized crowds to heckle the people in the churches and to keep them inside until the pope finished speaking.

Bolanos said he was in a command post, just off the square, that coordinated the various groups, putting in the forefront groups of women carrying pictures of sons who had died during the Sandinista overthrow of dictator Gen. Anastasio Somoza in 1979. The women were urged to ask the pope to pray for their sons' souls, which in the Sandinistas' eyes would have allied him with their struggle.

"He didn't want to do it because if he had, it would have meant he was in solidarity with the communist army," Bolanos said. As the pope began praying on another subject, one of the women gained control of the microphone system and begged him to pray for her son the martyr. Her act was "practically a sacrilege, an act of total disrespect," he continued.

The pope left the square without finishing the prayer, Bolanos said. The disruption "was a success, because many people thought the lack of respect was spontaneous, and that the pope was simply against the revolution."

The church in Nicaragua originally backed the Sandinista government but in 1980 Archbishop Obando y Bravo began complaining of growing censorship and repression of dissent. He became a major target of surveillance after the pope's visit, Bolanos continued. When the archbishop tried to remove a priest favorable to the Sandinistas, mobs were organized to pose as parishioners, take over the church and beat up the new priest, according to Bolanos.

Lenin Cerna, head of the Interior Ministry's department of state security, issued written orders that all existing information and all new material on the bishop was to be sent to an analysis center, and the order was posted on intelligence office walls, Bolanos said. "They are collecting all the information to design a plan to destroy him."

An earlier part of that effort involved the archbishop's spokesman, the Rev. Carballo, who initially came under Bolanos' jurisdiction because of Carballo's friendship

with many Americans in Nicaragua. Bolanos said he was told that the F4 section of the security operation—assigned to keep track of the churches, unions and political parties—was planning to use a prostitute "known and used by all the Sandinista high command" to disgrace Carballo.

The prostitute, named Marixsa, posed in 1982 as a penitent asking Carballo's counsel on personal problems. She tried to win Carballo's confidence, hoping eventually to seduce him, Bolanos said.

Finally, while the two were talking over lunch one day last August, an F4 agent burst into the room, pretending to be the woman's husband. He attacked the priest, ripping his clothes off, and pushed him into the street where people organized by the F7 unit were waiting with cameras. Also waiting outside was a van with dark windows, in which Cerna and Interior Minister Tomas Borge had front-row seats from which to laugh at the naked priest, Bolanos said.

Government media played up the event, claiming Carballo had been caught in a love triangle. The archbishop—correctly, Bolanos indicated—said the whole incident had been "a show to slander the church."

—Joanne Omang and Don Oberdorfer